

THE FIGHT AGAINST

TROTSKYISM

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The history of the Communist Party of the United States is a history of unceasing struggle against opportunism in all its guises. At one time or another the Party has had to do battle against outbursts of Right opportunism and revisionism or of "Left" sectarianism, and frequently against both simultaneously.

In June, 1929, hardly a decade after its birth, the Party was compelled to rid itself of Jay Lovestone and some 200 of his followers. Lovestone had developed a theory of American exceptionalism, according to which U.S. capitalism was exempt from the laws of development governing the rest of the capitalist world. On these grounds he concluded that a long-term period of prosperity lay ahead in which the class struggle in all its aspects would be greatly softened. Ironically, these Right-wing revisionist ideas were propagated on the eve of the 1929 crash which precipitated the worst economic crisis in history - a development which both the CPUSA and the Communist International had forecast. Lovestone, as we know, ended up as George Meany's advisor on international affairs, masterminding the AFL-CIO bureaucracy's pro-imperialist intrigues and CIA-financed wrecking activities abroad.

But Lovestone's expulsion followed only by several months that of a Trotskyite faction headed by James P. Cannon, Max Schachtman and M. Abern. The three were expelled in October, 1928 as splitters, disrupters and political degenerates, and subsequently about 100 of their followers were ousted with them. The political ideas espoused by this grouping, though clothed in revolutionary-sounding language, were, as we shall see, no less opportunist, no less a surrender of the struggle for socialism than was the Right-wing revisionism of Lovestone. Indeed, the two groups found common ground after their expulsion, not least in their bitter hatred of the Communist Party.

In later years the Party had to contend with the Browder and Gates revisionist threats. But it also had to face upsurges of ultra-Leftism at various times. In fact, at the height of the battle against the Gates liquidators the Party was also confronted by ultra-revolutionary grouplets which had left its ranks to set up "genuine" Marxist-Leninist parties. And later it had to deal with a grouping which formed the nuc-

leus of the ultra-Leftist Progressive Labor Party. Significantly, its ringleaders were expelled for conspiring to liquidate the Party to escape the attacks on it under the McCarran Act.

The Nature and Roots of Trotskyism

Trotskyism was long ago characterized by V.I. Lenin as a petty-bourgeois deviation from Marxism, as an expression of "Left" opportunism - of capitulation to the class enemy under a cloak of "revolutionary" phrasemongering. This it carries to an extreme, making its "revolutionary" posturing a basis for the advancement of policies which invariably serve the interests of reaction.

For most of the period of his political activity before 1917, Leon Trotsky was a Menshevik, who made a career of attempting unprincipled reconciliation of Menshevik opportunism and Bolshevism in the name of "centrism." The Soviet historian M.N. Pokrovsky, writing about the 1905 revolution in his "Brief History of Russia" (International Publishers, N.Y., 1931, Vol II, p. 320), describes him in these words:

... During the whole period of its activity, the Petersburg Soviet had at its head a very intelligent and clever Menshevik, an adept in the art of combining Menshevik substance with revolutionary phrases. The name of that Menshevik was Trotsky. He was a genuine, full-blown Menshevik, who had no desire whatever for the armed insurrection and was altogether averse to bringing the revolution to its completion, i.e., to the overthrow of tsarism.

Lenin himself wrote in 1910:

Trotsky . . . represents only his own personal vacillations and nothing more. In 1903 he was a Menshevik; he abandoned Menshevism in 1904, returned to the Mensheviks in 1905 and merely flaunted ultra-revolutionary phrases; in 1906 he left them again; at the end of 1906 he advocated electoral agreements with the Cadets (i.e., he was in fact once more with the Mensheviks); and in the spring of 1907, at the London Congress, he said that he differed from Rosa Luxemburg on "individual shades of ideas rather than on political tendencies." One day Trotsky plagiar-

izes from the ideological stock-in-trade of one faction; the next day he plagiarizes from that of another, and therefore declares himself to be standing above both factions. ("Collected Works", Vol. 16, p. 391)

These comments are typical of the opinions of Trotsky expressed repeatedly in Lenin's writings throughout this period.

In late summer of 1917, Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks. An effective speaker and writer, he was given every opportunity to play a leading part in the events to come. He became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet and after the October Revolution he held the post of Commissar of Foreign Affairs for a time; subsequently he became a member and later chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council. He was thus an important figure during and after the period of the uprising.

However, he abandoned neither his old habits nor his old ideas. His super-revolutionism emerged some years later as a pretext for abandoning the socialist revolution, in the name of his pseudo-Marxist theory of "permanent revolution." This doctrine is the theoretical foundation of Trotskyism. Here is how Trotsky presents it in his book "The Year 1905", written in 1922. He states in the preface:

It was precisely during the interval between January 9 and the October strike of 1905 that the views on the character of the revolutionary development of Russia which came to be known as the theory of "permanent revolution" crystallized in the author's mind. This abstruse term represented the idea that the Russian revolution, whose immediate objectives were bourgeois in nature, could not, however, stop when these objectives had been achieved. The revolution would not be able to solve its immediate bourgeois problems except by placing the proletariat in power. And the latter, upon assuming power, would not be able to confine itself to the bourgeois limits of the revolution. On the contrary, precisely to assure its victory, the proletarian vanguard would be forced in the very early stages of its rule to make deep inroads not only into feudal property but into bourgeois property as well. In this it would come into hostile collision not only with all the

bourgeois groupings which supported the proletariat during the first stages of its revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry with whose assistance it came to power. The contradictions in the position of a workers' government in a backward country with an overwhelmingly peasant population could be solved only on an international scale, in the arena of the world proletarian revolution. (Quoted in J. Stalin, "Works", Vol. 6, pp. 383-384.)

In brief, the bourgeois-democratic revolution, even to solve its own problems, must lead directly to working-class political power and this in turn to immediate steps toward abolition of capitalist property relations. Thereby the working class is brought, almost from the beginning, into direct conflict with the peasantry and other sections of the democratic forces, for these non-proletarian elements, in Trotsky's view, have no role in the socialist revolution. In this the working class fights alone. And hence, particularly in a country where the working class is relatively small and the peasantry large, as in Tsarist Russia, socialism cannot be successfully established unless the socialist revolution is first victorious in other, more advanced countries. Says Trotsky:

... The socialist revolution begins on national foundations- but cannot be completed on these foundations alone. The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs. . . . In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the successes achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions. The way out for it lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. (Isaac Deutscher, ed., "The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology", Dell Publishing Co., New York, 1964, p. 65.)

In short, the victory of socialism in a single country is impossible. In his book "The Year 1917", which appeared in 1924, Trotsky argues that the victory of socialism is possible only in several of the principal European countries simultaneously. The task

in Russia after the October Revolution, therefore, was not to engage in futile efforts to build socialism but rather to hold this in abeyance while working to "propel" the revolution abroad. Thus, under the banner of his "revolutionary" - sounding theory of "permanent revolution," Trotsky counseled retreat and abandonment of the socialist revolution in Russia.

The Fight Against Trotskyism in the Twenties

Within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Trotsky's views were never accepted by more than a small minority. Nevertheless, in his efforts to force them on the Party he precipitated a factional struggle which lasted throughout most of the twenties.

In 1921, when the Civil War had barely ended and the country was faced with staggering problems, Trotsky launched a campaign to establish the trade unions not as democratic organizations of the workers but as dictatorially-run organs for managing production. Instead of permitting the question to be decided within the Central Committee, he and his supporters forced a full-dress discussion on the Party at a moment when the fate of the country hung in the balance. The discussion resulted in their overwhelming defeat.

In 1923 the Trotskyites again forced a discussion on the Party. This time an all-out assault was launched against the Party leadership, which was attacked as a degenerate bureaucracy, and a campaign was conducted in the Party organizations to turn the membership against the leadership. In January, 1924 the Thirteenth Conference of the Party condemned Trotsky's factional campaign, and in July the Fifth Congress of the Communist International similarly condemned Trotskyism, characterizing it as a petty-bourgeois deviation.

However, in the autumn of 1924 a discussion was once more forced on the Party, this time in an effort to impose Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution" on it. After a very extended discussion, a joint plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission condemned Trotsky's conduct, warned him in the strongest language that he must desist and submit to Party discipline, and removed him from the Revolutionary Military Council.

But the discussions went on, with the Trotskyites joined by a "New Opposition" headed by Zinoviev and Kamenev. In October 1927 Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Central Committee for their factional activities. Subsequently, in discussions preceding the Fifteenth Congress, 724,000 Party members voted for the policy of the Central Committee and 4,000 -- less than one per cent -- for the Trotsky-Zinoviev line. Such was the accomplishment of the Trotskyites in the endless debates which diverted the Party from its most urgent tasks over a period of years.

The Fifteenth Congress, held in December 1927, expelled Trotsky and Zinoviev and 75 of their followers from the Party. Not long afterward Trotsky was expelled from the country. The Trotsky group applied for readmission to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in August, 1928. The appeal was unanimously rejected. The Congress characterized the group as "objectively an organ of struggle against the Soviet Power" and condemned the "counter-revolutionary political content of the Trotskyist platform."

Trotsky's opportunist doctrine of the abandonment of socialist construction could only be rejected by a working class and a party which had gone through such Herculean efforts to achieve and retain political power. And needless to say, it could only be welcomed by every counter-revolutionary element in Russia and abroad. The continued pursuit of such a line after its overwhelming rejection by the Party, therefore, could only lead to unprincipled factionalism and to alliances with enemies of the working class. It could only lead to a process of degeneration ending in counter-revolution disguised in revolutionary verbiage and having as its main objective the overthrow of the Soviet regime in the name of "saving the revolution." And this, history records, is exactly what happened to Trotsky and his followers. It is just such a counter-revolutionary sect, masquerading in the garb of "revolution," that Trotskyism became.

Trotskyism and the U.S. Party

The struggle against the Trotskyites in the Bolshevik Party was not without its repercussions in

the Party here. During this period the Workers Party (which later became the Communist Party) was itself split into opposing factions. Of this, William Z. Foster writes: "The labor party campaign of 1922-24 gave birth to a sharp factional struggle within the Workers Party, which was to continue, with greater or less intensity, until 1929. Grave inner-party differences developed over the strategy and tactics to be pursued in the fight for the labor party. The Party was split into two major groups which, in the heat of the internal fight, came to act almost like two separate parties, with their specific caucuses and group disciplines." ("History of the Communist Party of the United States", International Publishers, N.Y., 1952, p. 221.) The rift was finally healed after the expulsion of Lovestone in 1929 and the six-year period of factionalism was brought to an end.

It was into this factional situation that the issue of Trotskyism was injected. On the whole the Party leadership of both factions joined with the Russian party in repudiating Trotsky's ideas. Thus the "Daily Worker" of December 20, 1924 reprinted from "Pravda" a review of Trotsky's book "The Year 1917", entitled "How One Should Not Write the History of October." It was accompanied by a box containing the text of a decision of the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party, instructing all Party newspapers to publish the review.

In subsequent months the "Daily Worker" published speeches by Zinoviev and Kamenev sharply attacking Trotskyism as petty-bourgeois radicalism. (Both of these individuals, as we have already noted, later allied themselves with Trotsky.) An educational campaign was conducted in the Party exposing the nature of Trotskyism and polemizing against it.

But not all in the Party leadership were opposed to Trotsky's views. There were some who were influenced by them and sought to promote them within the Party. Among these the leading light was James P. Cannon, who brought matters to a head in 1928 after attending the Sixth Congress of the Communist International as a delegate from the United States. Upon his return to this country he proceeded to organize a secret faction which clandestinely spread Trotskyite

ideas, advocating such steps as withdrawal from existing unions and abandonment of the united front. The career of this group was short-lived, however; in October, 1928, only some two months after the Sixth Congress, Cannon and his associates were thrown out of the Party.

After their expulsion the Trotskyites organized themselves as an opposition group. In 1934 they amalgamated with A. J. Muste's American Workers Party of the U.S. In this union, which lasted only a short time, they were associated with such sterling revolutionaries as Max Eastman and Sidney Hook. In 1936 the Trotskyites merged with the Socialist Party. A year and a half later they separated and in January, 1938 they emerged as the Socialist Workers Party, which remains the chief Trotskyite organization today. In September, 1938 a handful of Trotskyites - thirty delegates from eleven countries, to be exact - met to form a "Fourth International." Of this body the S.W.P. was initially a member and is currently a supporter.

Trotskyism has never attracted any sizable numbers of adherents in this country. According to an American Civil Liberties Union brief in defense of an S.W.P. member against deportation proceedings in 1962, "the Socialist Workers Party is small, with a peak membership of 3,000 and present membership of about 600, is a wholly internal group, and is an 'arch enemy' of the Soviet Union." ("Civil Liberties", April, 1962.) Its youth offshoot, the Young Socialist Alliance, falls within the same range. The SWP's weekly newspaper, "The Militant", claims a circulation of about 4,000.

Other Trotskyite factions exist, which have split off from the SWP. One is the Workers World group which publishes a biweekly newspaper of that name and has its own youth group, Youth Against War and Fascism. A more recent splinter is a group calling itself the Spartacists. Other groups which have split off in past years have become defunct, for example the Labor Action group headed by Shachtman, which has since entered the Socialist Party.

Though small in numbers, these groups are highly active and vociferous, and a source of constant dis-

ruption in the Left.

The Ideology of Trotskyism Today

The foundation of Trotskyite ideology is the theory of "permanent revolution" and its offshoot, the concept of the impossibility of building socialism in a single country. Its essence, based on these ideas, is virulent anti-Sovietism.

What exists in the Soviet Union, according to Trotskyism, is not socialism. To be sure, economically collective ownership and production exist, but politically the effort to maintain these has led to a "bureaucratic deformation", to the growth of a parasitic, dictatorial bureaucracy which is strangling the Soviet people. The establishment of true socialism, therefore, requires nothing less than the "political overthrow" of this regime. The same goes, of course, for the other socialist countries.

This theme appears endlessly in Trotskyite literature. A resolution entitled "The European Revolution and the Tasks of the Revolutionary Party", adopted by the SWP in November, 1944, states: "We call on the Soviet workers to organize the forces for the revolutionary overthrow of the oligarchy in the Kremlin and set up a genuine Soviet democracy as the essential condition for the preservation of the Soviet Union and of Socialist construction." A pamphlet by Joseph Hansen, "The Socialist Workers Party--What It Is--What It Stands For", published in 1958, says: "The Soviet bloc is clearly headed for great new events: a workers' political revolution that will clean out the Stalinist bureaucracy, ending its despotic rule and re-establishing workers democracy in the Soviet Union." And so on, down to the present.

The Soviet people are repeatedly referred to as "fighting for their freedom", and the Hungarian counter-revolution in 1956 is hailed as a supposed example of this "freedom fight", as are the activities of anti-socialist elements in Poland during the same period. Thus, the end result of Trotsky's "revolutionary" theory is to place Trotskyism squarely in the anti-Soviet camp--the camp of those who would "liberate" the Soviet people from Soviet power. True, the "bureaucratic degeneration" is most closely identi-

fied with Stalin, but his successors are regarded as basically no different.

In keeping with this anti-Soviet line is the thesis of the impossibility of peaceful coexistence. The whole idea, in the Trotskyite view, is nothing more than a betrayal of the interests of the world revolutionary forces by the Soviet leaders in order to perpetuate their parasitic existence. This view is spelled out, for example, in the 1956 SWP election platform in these words:

They (the Kremlin bureaucrats) advocate "peaceful coexistence" as the answer to war. Their aim is to preserve the status quo. But the status quo is what the masses the world over are rebelling against. They are in revolt against capitalist exploitation and oppression, as well as against the authoritarian bureaucracy in the Soviet orbit.

In the hope of evolving a diplomatic deal with imperialism, the Soviet rulers undertake to derail revolutions in the capitalist sphere, substituting capitalist reform policies for revolutionary socialism. Stalin's heirs seek coexistence with imperialism in order to retain their bureaucratic privileges and the power to repress the struggle for workers' democracy in the Soviet sphere. Using the Communist Parties to disarm the masses politically in the struggle against capitalism, they undermine the revolutionary process which stands as the only effective obstacle to imperialist war.

By the same token, the fight for peaceful coexistence is regarded as a betrayal of the aspirations of the colonial peoples for freedom.

When the Mao group in China propounded the same anti-Soviet propositions some years later, the Trotskyites were quick to point out: "We said it first."

From the theory of "permanent revolution" it follows that the working class has no interest in fighting for bourgeois democracy. Its one goal is socialism and it continues in a state of "permanent revolution" until this is achieved. In this struggle, moreover, it has no allies of any consequence.

Correspondingly, Trotskyism rejects the fight for democracy and with it the concept of the united front for democratic objectives, which is characterized as the disease of "united frontism" or "coalitionism." To be sure, Trotskyites nevertheless seek to become a part of united-front democratic movements. They do so, however, not for the purpose of fostering the aims of such movements but rather to use them as vehicles for propagating their own ideas. They strive to impose their program on the coalition, in particular to convert it from a democratic movement to an "anti-capitalist" one. To the degree that they are successful they end by splitting the united front and strengthening the hand of reaction. And of course, since they enter such coalitions under false pretenses, concealment of their real views is a common feature of their operations.

From the thirties on, they have refused to recognize the struggle against fascism as a struggle for democracy, uniting all democratic forces, but have viewed it as a struggle in which the only alternative to fascism is socialism.

Of the heroic struggles of the Spanish Loyalist forces against Franco fascism, they wrote ("History and Principles of the Fourth International", p. 21): "The Spanish civil war was clearly a struggle between socialism and capitalism. The fascists, at least, understood this. But the popular front dominated by the Stalinists and the GPU turned the struggle into a pure defense of democratic capitalism." And this "error" they undertook to rectify by means of a putsch launched by the Trotskyite POUM against the Loyalist forces with the alleged aim of converting the struggle into a fight for socialism.

This infamy was matched by the attitude of the Trotskyites to World War II. They saw it not as an anti-fascist war but simply as an imperialist war in which the imperialist powers on both sides were vying for domination and in which the Soviet Union was involved as a parasite-ridden degenerate state ready to play ball with either group of imperialists against the other in order to preserve its existence. The sole way out of the war was socialism, and accordingly they

called for the overthrow of both the United States and Soviet governments - a course of action which could only delight Hitler and his cohorts.

Such was the Trotskyite contribution to the life-and-death struggle against fascism. Thus did they assist the butchers of six million Jews and countless other victims. In like manner, in the days of McCarthyism they failed to see any difference between McCarthy and his foes and rejected any idea of a democratic coalition against McCarthyism.

The Trotskyites rigidly adhere to a policy of supporting no candidates whatever who run on Democratic or Republican party tickets but only those candidates who run on "independent" - that is, "anti-capitalist" - tickets. In practice, this means that they virtually limit themselves to the support of Trotskyite candidates.

In keeping with this, they have refused to give any support to peace candidates and in 1968 they flatly rejected the idea of an independent presidential peace ticket. When a King-Spock ticket was projected, the YSA publication Young Socialist (September, 1967) had this to say about it:

The key problem with the King-Spock ticket is that despite its "independence" from the two major capitalist parties, it does not represent a break with capitalist politics. Neither King's nor Spock's programs challenge the capitalist system. Their programs come down to merely criticisms of, or tactical differences with, the capitalist politicians who are presently in power.

On this same point a YSA resolution adopted in 1966 says: "We counterpose a socialist program to any 'peace' campaign based on a capitalist program." And it adds: "It is also extremely important that we support and campaign for all genuinely independent socialist candidates especially when they are counterposed to liberal politicians or peace candidates." (Emphasis added.) Such is Trotskyism's contribution to unifying the peace forces and developing independent political action.

Trotskyism has always sought to make capital of
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the struggles of black Americans, and with the upsurge of the black liberation movement it has, not surprisingly, made this a focus of its activities. It begins with the contention that the fight against oppression of the black people cannot be won without socialism. To be sure, there is more than a grain of truth in linking the struggle for Negro freedom with socialism. But the Trotskyites, in their typical fashion, proceed to make the two identical. Thus, the 1964 SWP election platform calls for "an anticapitalist alliance of all those who suffer discrimination and exploitation, black and white." (The Militant, April 6, 1964.) From this "anti-capitalist alliance" it is clear, are to be excluded all elements in the black liberation movement who are not prepared to fight for socialism. Thus does Trotskyism do battle against the unity of that movement - an all-class movement for freedom from national oppression - in the name of "fighting capitalism!"

The Trotskyites look upon black nationalism as the revolutionary ideology among black Americans. A resolution adopted by the 1963 SWP Convention states: "Negro nationalism plays a function for the Negro people here in many ways like that which class consciousness plays for the working class." Hence "revolutionary socialists welcome the growth of nationalism!" Correspondingly they call for the establishment of a separate black political party and favor the establishment of a separate black state. On the latter they quote Trotsky to the following effect:

.....To fight for the possibility of realizing an independent state is a sign of great moral and political awakening. It would be a tremendous revolutionary step

It is very possible that Negroes also through self-determination will proceed to the proletarian dictatorship in a couple of gigantic strides, ahead of the great block of white workers. They will then furnish the vanguard. (Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, Merit Publishers, N.Y.)

George Breitman speaks of "the capacity of the Negro people to lead the working-class revolution to replace capitalism with socialism." and he proceeds to advise them on "How a Minority Can Change Society" in a currently circulating pamphlet of that name.

Virtually nothing is said about unity of black and white as the basis of the struggle for progress or about the need to fight racism among white Americans; there is only advice to the black people on how to be a vanguard.

Trotskyites are inveterate factionalists; indeed, they make a principle of factionalism, equating democratic centralism with the right to organize factions. Not only has this led to endless splits among the Trotskyites themselves; it has also formed the basis of their relations with other organizations on the Left. When they speak of "unity" with such organizations, what they have in mind is to penetrate, disrupt and destroy them. To these parasitic actions they have given the name of "the tactics of entrism."

A classical example is their merger with the Socialist Party in the thirties. By the time the merger broke up they had succeeded in wrecking the Socialist Party organizationally to such an extent that it was left a hollow shell of its former self. Of this achievement, Cannon writes in his History of American Trotskyism: "Comrade Trotsky remarked, when we talked with him, about the total result of our entry into the Socialist Party and the pitiful state of the organization afterward. He said that alone would have justified the entry into the organization even if we hadn't gained a single member."

As for the Communist Party, Trotskyism considers it the central obstacle to be removed from its path. For years the Trotskyites have sought to infiltrate it and to undermine it in every possible way. If they have not succeeded, it has not been for lack of trying. But more important, their failure is a tribute to the cohesiveness of the Communist Party to its constant fight against factionalism and for a common line and policy in its ranks.

Trotskyism has long been no more than a degenerate, counter-revolutionary sect masquerading as "Marxists" and operating as a parasitic excrescence on the Left. Clearly, the fight against this alien element did not end with the expulsion of the Trotskyites from the Party in 1928. It has continued throughout the years since then, and it will of necessity continue in the future until this voice of the enemy within the working-class movement no longer exists.